

The Ballarat Naturalist

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80 Years of Bird Photography Dr David Hollands

Preamble: When FNCB member Carol began to read David's autobiography *Better Born Lucky Than Brilliant* published in 2023, and having bought three of David's bird books over time, she realised that, though 15 years apart in age, her early years were similar to his. He had boarded at Oundle School in England a few miles away from a sailing club frequented by Carol's family, and both he and Carol had, at different times and in different locations, sailed the same class of sailing dinghy. Both were interested in the local countryside. Both began their interest in photography with a Box Brownie. After qualifying as a doctor from Birmingham University, together with his wife – also a doctor – he decided to spend two or three years in Australia, fully intending to return to England. Carol too decided to spend two years teaching in Australia, expecting to return to England. They stayed, and so did she. David and his wife eventually took over a practice in Orbost where they remained. Having read this, Carol decided to email David about their similar activities. The conversation led to an invitation to speak to FNCB.

David was initially inspired by Eric Hosking's books on birds and photography. (*An Eye for a Bird* would be his best known publication). Remember that for most of his life David was using



film, and mastering techniques with the different cameras made for much experimentation. His first serious cameras in England were field cameras (see illustration Page 1) with slow shutter speeds. This necessitated positioning the equipment near the nests or perches where little movement was involved since birds in flight could not be captured by such cameras.

We saw shots of Snipe, Woodcock, Reed Warbler – and then he became fascinated by owls. Nocturnal bird photography required the use of flash – in those days done by using magnesium – bright but explosive, scaring the bird away! The bird returned in time however, enabling his first shot of a Barn owl with chicks.



Whilst initially working in Hamilton, Victoria, David participated in trips to the Mallee in search of the Mallee Whipbird. When he moved to Orbost in 1963 he became interested in harriers and obtained good photos.

Birds of prey had become David's main interest and prompted the decision to write a book.

At this point David showed us the 60' towers (constructed in 22' sections) used to position cameras opposite owl nests high up in the canopy, resulting in gasps of astonishment from those unaware that such gear was used.



He explained the use of infra-red beams which tripped the camera's shutter when the bird flew through; the constant re-adjustment of the beam, the flashguns and climbing up and down, then waiting to process the film to see if the project was successful.

Expeditions inland to Birdsville and other areas for Black Falcon, Pacific Basa, Red Goshawk and Grey Goshawk followed, while near home in Gippsland

Sea Eagles (right) presented themselves.

Thus the book *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons* was born.



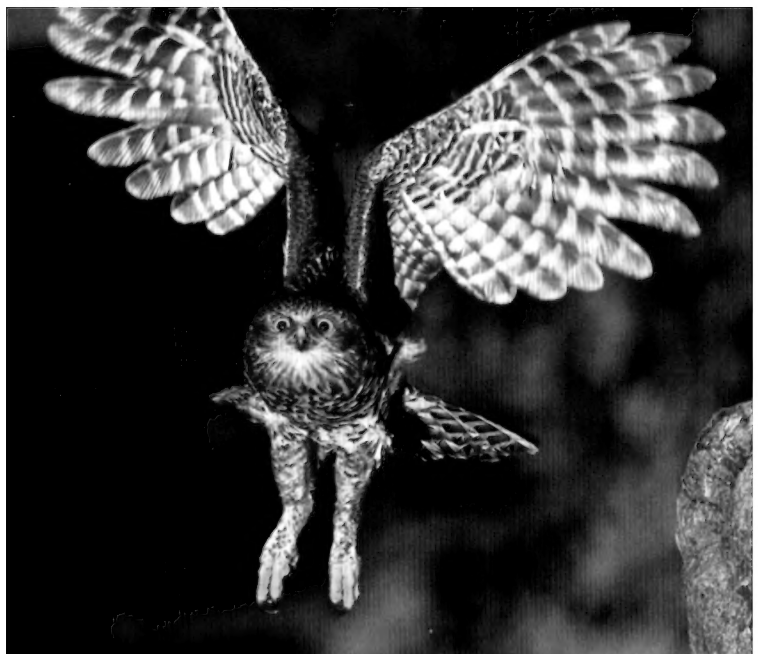
In co-operation with John Young, arguably one of Australia's greatest ever naturalists, David devoted his attention to owls, necessitating the use of the towers, and sometimes mist nets if birds were to be banded and have trackers attached. *Birds of the Night* which included Frogmouths and Night-jars was produced as a result.

Photos of Rufous, Sooty, Powerful and Boobook owls and more were obtained.



Barn owl

Powerful owl





Eastern grass owlets
The only Australian owl that nests on the ground

His book *Kingfishers and Kookaburras* followed, although it took seven years to find and photograph all the Australian species. David had us all laughing when he had carefully set up the IR beam with mirror, several flashguns, a tank of fish and left the camera to take images of a kingfisher diving into the water. Upon inspection later, the film was finished – full of heron photos!



Sacred Kingfisher

Also at Oundle School had been the well-known Clive Minton who came to Australia in 1978 and was instrumental in establishing the Victorian Wader Study Group; the two worked together. Bar-tailed Godwits at Broome were the species used by David to illustrate the tracking work done by this group using cannon netting.

Thousands of Banded Stilts (below) massed on Lake Corangamite and seen from the air was another impressive event.



Overseas expeditions resulted in material for the book *Owls - Journeys around the World*.

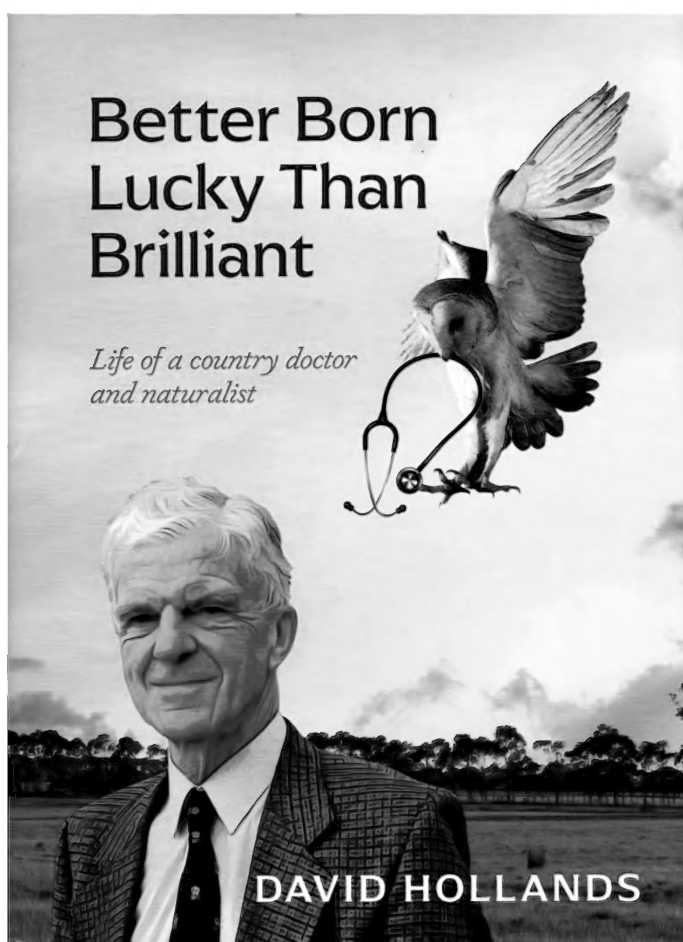
David thrilled us with his photographs and kept us involved with the adventures experienced in his search for particular species. Today's technology using digital cameras is a far cry from those early years but field craft will always remain vital.

References: *Birds of the Night* - 1991; *Kingfishers and Kookaburras* - 1999; *Owls – Journeys around the World* - 2004; *Better Born Lucky Than Brilliant* - 2023. David Hollands.

All images courtesy David Hollands.
Report Carol Hall.



Azure kingfisher



FNCB MT COLE EXCURSION, 7th July 2024.

Bushfire recovery was the theme of our July outing to various forested parts of the Beaufort district, where we visited a few places on the eastern side of the Mt Cole forest. Leader Neville Oddie had prepared an interesting tour of areas burnt by the extensive (20,000 hectares) and long-lasting bushfires of late February, as well as one spot burnt four years ago.

Several of our members (including some from Lal Lal) noticed scorched embers (blackened, lightweight and crisp, but not consumed) from February's fire.



Approaching the forest from Raglan on a day of welcome winter sunshine, occupants of the nine cars soon had views of scorched forested hills. Our first main stop was on Water Race Road, in an area where we could compare the utter blackness of the fire just over



four months' earlier, with an area also burnt at the same time, but which had been intentionally "fuel-reduced" about three years earlier. As naturalists, we found much more of interest on the "fuel-reduced" side of the road, where the fire intensity was clearly reduced this year. Apart from the eucalypts' epicormic shoots, there was very little growth yet evident in the stark blackness where fuel reduction had not taken place.

In the fuel-reduced area, we were soon finding regenerating plants as well as fungi. The latter were not numerous, but included a couple of species that, according to our books, are usually found on burnt ground. These were the brown *Peziza tenacella* (right) and the orange *Anthracobia muelleri*.



The epicormic growth of the eucalypts was of special interest: the silvery-toned wide Blue Gum (Southern Blue Gum or Eurabbie,



Eucalyptus globulus subsp. bicostata) foliage was very different from the green of the Messmate, Narrow-leaf Peppermint and Manna Gum. (right)

Also, the new growth of the blue gum was much more prolific, often sprouting from ground level almost to the top of the tree. (page 9)

Several birds provided interest: Spotted and Striated Pardalotes, Wedge-tailed Eagles, White-eared Honeyeater, Scarlet and Yellow Robins, and White-throated Treecreeper. A long-dead Sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*) was seen here.



On the return trip along Water Race Road, some of the cars stopped to view the healthy bright-green growth of the prickly-stemmed Rough Tree-fern (*Cyathea australis*), with some fronds now 1.5 metres or more long. (left)

The tallest of the fresh young Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) were the same height, although most were shorter.

At the same spot, our attention was drawn to some coin-sized, shallow cup-shaped, purple-brown fungi (*Peziza tenacella*, mentioned earlier) which we accidentally discovered emitted a smoke-

like mist of spores within a second of being blown upon. Tiny young eucalypts – Blue Gums and Messmates - were growing, with their first pairs of leaves apparent above their cotyledons.



Again, we considered the epicormic growth of blue gums, with one tall tree showing the dense new growth up to the tips of all its branches, with the old dead leaves still hanging on to the outer stems.

Lunch was taken at Richards Campground, very much changed in appearance since the fires.



An attractive narrow, clear, small stream flowed here. In a rather open damp gully was an attractive stand of regenerating Soft Tree-ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*).

Later research found that tree-fern trunks grow approximately 30 to

40 mm a year, so it was pleasing to note that these specimens, some of them two metres tall, had survived and resprouted.

Our final stop was several kilometres away, via bitumen and then a very attractive Candlebark-lined bush track to an intriguing isolated population of Austral Grass-tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*), burnt 4.5 years ago. This was on Grasstree Track, towards Ben Major, on the Lexton side of the range. Many grass-trees had recovered wonderfully, with full “skirts” of attractive foliage on fire-blackened trunks up to two metres tall. A concerning number, however, were now dead blackened stumps, having succumbed to the intense heat of that December 2019 wildfire. The leaf growth of grass-trees is surprisingly rapid after fire – quite different from their usual trunk growth of around ten millimetres a year. At least one seedling grass-tree – with a dozen leaves – was discovered. Here we also noticed four-metre coppice regrowth –



averaging more than a metre a year - of Long-leaf Box (*Eucalyptus gonicalyx*) and other eucalypts on the harsh skeletal soils.

Leader Neville Oddie had undertaken considerable research as well as pre-excursion visits for our benefit. This, combined with his effective leadership on the day, resulted in a very interesting and satisfying outing for all who attended.

Roger Thomas

Images RT, CH & VH

Excerpts from Club Meeting Minutes 7.30pm, July 5th 2024. Held in person and via Zoom

Opening and Apologies

Acting Chair Neville Oddie welcomed 18 members and nine visitors attending in person and seven members attending via Zoom.

Apologies: Angela Aldred, Mark Moravec, Andy Arnold and Elva Bird.

Guest Speaker: David Hollands OAM presented “80 years of bird photography”, a fascinating account of his expeditions to photograph birds around Australia and the world.

Business Arising from Previous Club Meeting on June 7, 2024

- Neville acknowledged the wonderful work of the Discovering Ballarat’s Bushland sub-committee to complete the revision and updating of DBB and get it ready for publishing. After a special meeting of members of the FNCB Committee and DBB Sub-committee, it was decided that 1,000 copies of the second edition of the book would be published, with \$2,000 in funding support requested from SEANA and the remainder (less than \$4,000) to be funded by the club and recouped from sales.

- After circumstances led to the postponement of our proposed field trip in September, we will now run a field trip at Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary that will include optional sessions for iNaturalist training/ support at the beginning and the end of the day in the Clare Miller Environment Centre on **Saturday 7th September**.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

- Whilst considering returning Club documents/ records that were used to complete her PhD thesis in June, Susan Kruss had second thoughts. Perhaps she should hold on to them a little longer, using them to expand her thesis into a book? She wondered if there might be some members who would consider joining a sub-committee to help her write a book about our Club’s amazing, storied history? If you would like to participate, please contact Emily.

- Discuss invitation to participate in a workshop to gather insights on the environmental values of Woowookarung Regional Park. John Gregurke volunteered to be a representative of the FNCB, with a few other members also likely to participate including Judith Bailey who plans to advocate for the opportunity for Woowookarung RP to be a Dark Sky place.

Motion: That John G be endorsed as the FNCB representative at the workshop. Carried

- Neville noted that it was entirely consistent with the Club's objectives and history to provide a formal submission to the new Draft Wildlife (Game) Regulations, i.e. primarily duck - and quail-hunting regulations. He will work on a Club submission to be submitted on/ by Monday 29th July. Please contact him at your earliest convenience if you have any feedback on the draft regulations that could be included.

Reports:

Treasurer's Report

Opening bal. as at June 7, 2024: \$9,250.63

Income \$286.24

Expenses: \$347.81

Closing bal.: \$9,189.06

General Business

Sunday 7th July field trip, 9.30am – 4pm: “Environmental recovery from the bushfires near Beaufort” to be led by Neville Oddie.

Show & Tell/ Field Reports

- Peter D updated us on the condition of the “Linton Block” after a recent visit. The western fence had been renewed by persons/ organisation unknown and was in good condition. There were quite a few fallen branches across the northern fence. The fallen tree previously blocking the entrance track had been cleared. There was no sign of any recent illegal firewood collection that had been evident in the past, with a healthy layer of coarse woody debris.

- Claire reported 40 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flying over the football ground at Skipton in June, along with 50-80 of them spotted in flight in Creswick recently.

- John G mentioned approximately 200 Corellas at Lake Wendouree this week with the majority being Little Corellas, a bird rarely seen in Ballarat five years ago. The remainder were Long-billed Corellas.

- Val was enjoying the Silvereyes and Crimson Rosellas feeding on the Pomegranates in her backyard in Ballarat.

Next Meeting: “Native terrestrial orchids: More questions than answers” to be presented by BJ Johnson, self-described orchid tragic and convener of the U3A Orchid Class.

When? Friday 2nd August 2024, 7.30pm in person at the Federation University building Gregory St, Wendouree or via Zoom if you prefer. Meeting closed 9.05 pm

VALE

John P alerted us to the passing of David Henderson, who was always helpful in our heritage work around Creswick.

There are new postings on David's life (from interviews by Janice Newton) and also on our application to Heritage Victoria for State Registration of Creswick Goldfield Water Distribution Heritage Precinct on the Creswick and District Historical Society website.

David Henderson Narrative - <https://www.creswickhistoricalsociety.org.au/stories/david-henderson-narrative/>

Water Distribution Precinct - <https://www.creswickhistoricalsociety.org.au/historical-news/>

**SEANA Marysville 25th –27th Oct 2024
SEANA Ballarat Spring 2025**

Our Next Club Meeting Friday Aug 2nd 7.30 pm

“Native terrestrial orchids: More questions than answers”

to be presented by BJ Johnson,

Terrestrial (ground) orchids provide endless fascination to anyone who discovers them in the natural environment. They are subtle and beautiful, and the fact that they are endemic to Australia means they are truly special. This means the growth and distribution of our native orchids are of great interest to anyone trying to get that ‘perfect’ photo. This talk will address some of the what, where, why, and how issues that influence our native terrestrial orchids.

We need a volunteer to write up B J’s presentation for the Newsletter please.

Sunday 4th August Field Trip- 9.30am to mid afternoon:

“Comparing Flora growth, particularly orchids, in differing landscapes in the Dereel area” to be led by BJ Johnson.

Meet in the Fed. Uni. carpark on the corner of Gillies St and Gregory St for carpooling/ convoy and departure at 9.30am sharp.
Or meet at the Dereel Community hall at 10 am

Warm clothes, rain gear, hand sanitiser, toilet paper and clean, sturdy shoes are recommended.

Bring water, small mirror, camera, magnifying lens, field guides, morning tea, lunch, thermos and camp chair.

Meetings and Excursions

Fri Aug 2nd Speaker BJ Johnson *Native Terrestrial Orchids:
More Questions Than Answers*

Sun Aug 4th Orchid discoveries near Dereel led by BJ

Future events

Fri Sept 6th *Speaker* Cameron Steele, People for A Living
Moorabool (PALM) *The Moorabool River*

Sat Sept 7th Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary that will include optional
sessions for iNaturalist training/ support at the beginning and the end
of the day in the Clare Miller Environment Centre

Volunteers needed to write up these events for our newsletter.

Next Committee meeting Tues. Aug 27th at 7.30 pm by Zoom

**Club meetings are normally held on 1st Friday of the month at
7.30 pm at the Federation Uni Gillies St Campus (corner of
Gillies and Gregory Sts, Lake Wendouree),
Committee**

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Treasurer

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Meetings - in person and may continue to be held via Zoom.
Members will be kept informed of arrangements each month.

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